

Mayor's Statement Regarding Anmore Conversations Speaking Notes for July 6, 2021 Regular Council Meeting

Over the past few months, all of us on Council have observed an alarming trend in our community involving comments on social media and at our virtual Council meetings that reflect an extreme “NIMBY” – not in my backyard – attitude that seems to be based on elitism.

We understand that there are residents who are critical of Council decisions and disagree with us. You should know that members of Council don't always agree with one another either.

But we respectfully listen when you share your opinions and when you explain why you don't like our position on something. That's all part of the process in local government.

But the **extreme NIMBY and elitist attitudes, accusations of corruption** and even **racism** we are seeing are **not** part of that process – and they're not even remotely acceptable.

So tonight –at our first in-person meeting since late 2020 – we are speaking out to clearly lay out our concerns about the toxic discourse created online by a small number of citizens and to talk about how we, as a Village Council, are responding.

I personally first became concerned during the community engagement process regarding Anmore South when I heard negative comments about the “type of people” who would come to our community if we allowed more affordable housing options such as townhomes.

These are some of the actual comments shared by your neighbours:

- “We don't want those types of people in our community.” ... Those types of people.
- “If people want other housing options, they can go live somewhere else.”
- “The community will no longer be safe.”
- This “safety” concern was also expressed in joint letter signed by 16 people that was sent to Council and, in referencing a so-called “crime upsurge,” stated:

“[An] influx of population without our own Police Station and crime prevention force puts Anmore and Belcarra residents at much higher risk; Anmore and Belcarra are already becoming targets for burglaries and robberies. ***Bringing in thousands of new residents from all walks of life puts an even more noticeable mark on all our homes, another very dangerous and high-risk consideration.***”

Yes, you heard correctly: People from “***all walks of life***” would bring danger to Anmore, according to the letter writers.

- More recently, posters have been put up in the Anmore area and neighbouring communities saying “***Crisis! Lakes at Risk!***” – as though new residents in Anmore would somehow damage the lakes and put public access at risk.
- Finally, at the June 15 virtual Council meeting, a resident expressed his objection to the mere potential for an Urban designation for the Anmore South lands by saying:

“My question is whether the Council believes this is fair to the long-standing residents of Anmore, to see their population multiply by at least three times, and solely to come from spot-zoning of Anmore South. Just to be clear, this means that once this development is fully built out and occupied, the existing Anmore residents will be in the minority.”

Those comments are just part of the reason I am speaking out today.

The discussion around Anmore South has also led to personal attacks on Council – and I don't mean the usual criticisms that come with the territory of being on Council. I'm talking about comments attacking Council members' integrity by strongly insinuating that we are corrupt.

I'm going to read a few of the particularly egregious comments:

- “Council is all buddy-buddy and can be coerced and cajoled through friendly insiders on their payrolls.”
- “Is it just me or is the fact that a prior Council member is on the Ioco Lands Developers TEAM paid by the developer to be LOBBYING (read that as coercing with monetary incentives) by ‘advising’ the current Council members.”
- “Even the best of us are blinded by the opportunity for monetary gain... There is also the new Council advisory group comprised of real estate agents and developers who are at play behind closed doors. The process is fraught with the potential of severe corruption, dereliction of duty and lack of transparency.”
- “I left out corrupt government and brown envelopes under tables, not because it isn't possible (buying out politicians is always a possibility anywhere in politics in the world), but there's not obvious proof of that going on.”
- “Has there been (palm greasing)... looks like YES!!!” – and that YES came with three exclamation marks.

This continued stream of innuendo and insinuations led to a question at a virtual Council meeting where a resident said, based on the “apparent partiality of your process to some of us,” he had to ask each member of Council to publicly disclose if they have any relationship with Gilic – the former Anmore South property owner. Council members then responded individually that they are not in any way associated with the property owner or developer – past or current. Even so, comments online have continued to suggest otherwise.

These types of insinuations have been extremely disturbing for us individually and for our families, and our thanks go to the residents who have reached out and supported us.

The attacks have recently extended to include identifiable members of staff, with a resident this past week calling for the “termination” of a staff member saying he “allowed such tree destruction” and made “tragic mistakes” when in fact this staff person did his job correctly. And in the same post, the resident went after other identifiable members of staff, accusing them of being “tragic, pathetic and unaccountable” – again, for doing their jobs correctly. In fact, eventually, the resident himself acknowledged that nothing untoward had been done, but his comments were already posted and seen by multiple people.

And now, the latest, most disturbing commentary we are seeing involves anti-Asian racism that has left us shocked.

- After a resident posted a link to a blog called “theBreaker”, a resident made a racist comment about the owners of the property who are Chinese referencing the “Claws of the Panda.”
- This then led to a resident at the June 18 virtual Council meeting commenting about the developer of the Ioco Lands having “close ties to the communist party of China” and asking whether this caused concerns to any members of Council. When a Councillor asked what he was basing his “facts” on, he cited only the blog.

Just as side note – “theBreaker” is a blog – not a mainstream media site with layers of oversight, editing and fact checking– yet this resident and others have used it as a means to advance their NIMBY agenda.

These posts, that can lead to further anti-Asian racism, did serve one purpose, though: They were the final impetus for this Council to take a stand – here, tonight – to say we do *not* support these types of comments. And we don’t want to be associated with conversations that are the antithesis of what makes Anmore a wonderful place to live.

Most of the conversations that have crossed these lines are taking place on the Anmore Conversations Facebook Group.

To be clear, we are not saying everyone who disagrees with an Urban designation in Anmore South is part of this – *not at all*. But there have been enough people involved that it has significantly shifted the tone and dynamics of the Anmore Conversations Facebook page.

With that said, we want to let our residents know that the Village will no longer be sharing and posting content on Anmore Conversations. We do not want to be seen as endorsing these types of comments and conversations, even if only by association.

We will continue to provide updates to our community via the Village Facebook page and website, notification emails – make sure you sign up at Anmore.com – and through other means. In fact, we will be posting this statement at Anmore.com tonight.

If you have questions about Village activities and services, or what Council is doing – please contact us directly and we will be happy to connect with you.

While I’ve been speaking on behalf of all of Council here tonight, I also want to provide an opportunity for my fellow Council members to share their own perspectives on this issue.